

TAMIL

KAATRAAI VARUVEN: Indira Soundararajan; Thiruvarasu Puththaka Nilaiyam, 13, Deenadayalu Street, T.Nagar, Chennai-600017. **Rs. 42.**

ALREADY POPULAR with TV viewers with his exciting stories for serials, Indira Soundararajan is a writer whose new works whip up certain expectations in the reader. And, he does not disappoint his avid readers.

The novel under review also falls under his pattern of story telling. It is a curious amalgam of suspense, thrill, terror, murder, investigation, superstition, faith, science, strong commonsense and some melodrama. He makes this literary device punch with his unflinching formula that the novel reads well keeping the reader engaged till the last paragraph of the last page. In this novel, he takes the reader into a world of ghosts, apparitions, penance, witchcraft and what not.

A photojournalist is pressed into service to cover a religious function in an old, sprawling bungalow. And, in the numerous cupboards in the bungalow are many skeletons, each one revealing a spine-chilling tale. The author is very clever in giving quotations, although relevant, to begin each chapter, a key to what is to follow, only at the end of the novel does the reader realise that they are false leads. The device is intelligent and cunning, besides being good transitional device.

In a curious mixture of the visual and the print medium, he narrates the story making sure that the chapter has a cliffhanger finish. The reader can glean the style of Sujatha in the manipulation of words. Some of his sexual analogies are new, bold and shocking as well.

He seems to be lost in his own world of suspense, terror and thrill, that the last few chapters, which reveal the design of the inmates of the haunted, ghost-ridden bungalow, seem to be hastily written. Like a lengthy mathematical problem having a single digit answer.

Written primarily to entertain, the author succeeds rather well. It should not come as a surprise if this novel too appears as a serial on the telly. At the end of the novel, he sulks away from answering the questions: Do spirits, ghosts exit; can science be manipulated, misapplied for creating

ghostly atmosphere and creating ghostly faith? Like a street magician who realises a mango tree from a small inverted basket and finally walks away with the basket and the mango sapling, the author has the last laugh. A gripping entertainer.

S. GOPALIE

MALAYALAM

THE DIVINE COMEDY: Dante Alighieri, translated by Kilimanoor Ramakantan; Sahitya Akademi, 38, Rabindra Bhavan, New Delhi-110001. **Rs. 300.**

THIS IS the first ever translation of Dante's classic in any Indian language and as such deserves special attention not only of Malayalam readers but others also. It is rendered into excellent Malayalam poetry by Ramakantan, himself a poet of repute in Malayalam.

The translation is based on works in English that are available, rendered from Latin vernacular by eminent authors. As is well known *The Divine Comedy* is the best Latin work that is appreciated the world over. Dante's relationship with Beatrice Portinari is presumed to be the indirect cause of this great work.

The first portion, *La Vitanuova* (new life) is said to be in the nature of the foreword, with divisions Hell, Purgatory and Paradise as others, with a total of 100 chapters. Dante (1265-1321A.D.) was a man of many parts — politician, lyricist, philosopher and idealistic lover.

He participated in the Florentine war "vigorously on horseback in the front rank". He has described Beatrice "as has never been said of any woman". He has also indicated problems faced by poets of his time and defended the use of vernacular tongue.

The Comedy is a long narrative poem (an epic) completed before his death in 1321 A.D. It is organised on the basis of elaborate use of symbolical numbers and is divided into three sections. As a critic has said, the poem has "one literal meaning and other multiple allegorical meanings".

Its ultimate purpose was to "remove those living in this life from a state of misery and lead to a state of happiness".

The present translation has given extensive footnotes at the end of each "sargam" (chapter) to

make clear subtle meanings and indirect references.

K. R. NARENDRANATH

TELUGU

PADYA MANJARI: Dr. Anthati Narasimham; Pub. by the author, 4, Santhosh Deluxe Apartments, Mehdiapatnam, Hyderabad-500028. **Rs. 50.**

AT A time when non-traditional versification has been ruling the roost since the second decade of the erstwhile 20th century in the Telugu poetic arena, it is gratifying that some eminent scholars and poets still stick to the traditional prosodic forms in composing their poetry, thus preserving the time-tested classical prosody, formulated, promoted and popularised by the eleventh century bard, Nannaya.

Some eminent poets who have forcefully expressed their modern progressive thoughts in the traditional way include G. Joshua, Jandhyala Papiah Sastry, Dr. V. R. Naarla and Kongara Jaggaiah.

An experienced teacher and poet, the author of the work under review has very skilfully employed traditional prosodic forms, including Vrittas in penning his musings on many mundane matters and personalities. A votary of the Nehru family, he composed eulogies on Jawaharlal Nehru, Indira Gandhi and Rajiv Gandhi and of course on Mahatma Gandhi. Caste discrimination, deprivation and privation of the Dalits, women and other hapless classes of people are his other themes.

A piece in praise of Mother India, a four-part versification under the title "God exploitation" and a two-part poem on holy men reflect his socialistic bent of mind and progressive outlook. In all there are 38 pieces of poetry in this collection. Though he, at times tends to be subjective in his musings, it is a readable work.

B. S. R. KRISHNA

KANNADA

PANDITAVARENIA — Life and works of Sri Sedyapu Krishna Bhatta: Dr. Padakallu Vishnu Bhatta; Sedyapu Krishna Bhatta Birth Centenary Committee, Rashtrakavi Govind Pai Samshodhana

TAMIL

INIPPUM PULIPPUM: Thein Pe Myint, translated by S. Perumal from the English translation of Usha Narayanan; Poompohar Padhippagam, 63, Prakasam Salai, Chennai-600018. Rs. 100.

LUCK HAS smiled upon the Burmese short story writer, Thein Pe Myint, at last. The First Lady of India chose to translate his stories into English for publication in *Frontline* as little was known about him in India. Which is a pity for there should be a definite interaction between ex-colonial countries at the level of literature. This is a forum where we can share the agony and ecstasy of poverty and freedom respectively.

Thein Pe Myint was one of the finest spokesmen of the Left movement in Burma. While studying in the college, he became a student leader and news correspondent of *New Light of Burma*. This was good seedtime for him and he soon blossomed into a writer while completing his law studies.

As one who was sympathetic towards the British during the Second World War, he had to go underground to avoid the Japanese. There were dramatic turns in his political life, related with sympathy by Usha Narayanan in her preface. It is sad that such a talented, creative writer like him had to pour much of his creative hours into the "malbowges" of Burmese politics.

All the same, it is surprising that he was able to leave behind novels, innumerable short stories, a biography of Kyaw Nyein, essays and travelogues when he died in 1978 at the age of 64.

He was also the founder-editor of Botataung, which was proscribed by Ne Win in 1959. Usha Narayanan confesses that she had taken "the liberty of abbreviating long descriptive passages and changing the titles of some of the stories". But the rich texture of Thein Pe's writings is self-evident for they have even survived a double translation very well.

Though Thein Pe was a leftist, he did not care to write fire-belching propaganda. He saw the reality around and transferred his vision to verbalised

portraits. The scenarios appear familiar to the Indian experience. Probably this is the reason why Prof. Perumal's translation has a natural flow. The insensitive rich, the quiet frustration of the poor and the leery members of legislative assemblies who have bought their seats for a few thousands of rupees are nothing new to the Indian climate.

Thein Pe's stories are more like rough notes botched together. Probably he never had time to sculpt his stories to perfection. Even the tightening up by Usha Narayanan has not helped them in any big way. Again, it may be that a good deal of the original verve in Burmese is lost in the translation. But as an enlightened analysis of the state of a nation where the majority of the population lives in villages, the book is doubly welcome for the Tamil reader.

PREMA NANDAKUMAR

KAVITHAIKKUM KANNKAL UNDO? So. Po. Chockalingam; Poompohar Padhippagam, 63, Prakasam Salai, Chennai-600018. Rs. 36.

THIS IS a book of 45 poems by an author introduced to us as a retired bank officer, with a penchant for expression in verse. Using free verse of short and long lines, he has presented here his reflective responses to many common themes, often with anti-thetical contrastive statements asking questions intended to provoke thought.

The title poem asks the questions "Does even poetry possess eyes" and answers it in the affirmative pointing out that the mental vision goes beyond time and distance and brings in subtleties. The poet is excited over the mysteries of existence like the contrarities of human existence, the limitations imposed on man by the one without any limitations on himself, the unknowable secrecy of the origin of human life and unanswerable questions like "Which began first, cause or effect? Does the soul go out with the extinction of life in the body? Are the soul (aatma) and life different or one?"

The author's other observations on miscellaneous subjects are also thoughtful. Some of these are on the degradation and exploitation following India's independence, the exaltation of mother-

hood as a divinity, the ineffectiveness of the atomic bomb to ensure peace, the needless pursuit of novelties like the Japanese haiku (when we have thousands of pithy snappy verses in our literature) and tributes to our heroic soldiers.

The poet has also verses of devotion on the Omnipresent and Everlasting One, pervading all time and all opposites and to deities like the Lord of Palani (Murugan), Narayana and Kannan who has given him "the eye of wisdom" besides praises of the "Pranava" and "Namasivaya" Mantras. We meet here a gentleman of refined sensibilities looking at things reflectively, with dispassion, wondering at the complexities of life and benefiting from the wisdom of accepted traditions.

J. PARTHASARATHI

MALAYALAM

CHITRANGAL A. S.: R. J. Prasad — Editor; Current Books, Round West, Thrissur-680006. Rs. 115.

THIS IS a volume dedicated to the memory of Athipatta Sivaraman Nair, popularly known as A. S. Nair (1936-1988) an unforgettable name as an illustrator. He was associated with a Malayalam weekly, *Jayakeralam* and he later joined *Mathrubhumi* weekly, Kozhikode. A large number of his illustrations are reproduced in this work as also some of his other drawings and popular coverpages of several books. Most of his friends and some of his colleagues have written about him as a man, with special reference to his mind and manners.

The late A. S. Nair was a self-made man, who had suffered much in life. In spite of his sufferings he considered life as an "experiment of nature". The editor has done an excellent job, which is a model for others to follow when they plan similar memorial volumes. The book also contains some of A. S. Nair's selected writings.

K. R. NARENDRANATH

KANNADA

SRI MAHABHARATAVU (11 of the ultimate 19

known writer "Beechi" (Bellary Bhimasena Rao). Having found him after creating a scare all around, they produced him before their superior officer who happened to be a former student and fell at his feet and begged for his blessings!

There is the story of a retired teacher who refused to pay bribes and was consequently not paid arrears of his pension. A high and mighty IAS officer to whom the poor teacher went in appeal, speaks to him in an intemperate and arrogant way and says "you wait for the new century to get your arrears!" The teacher only asked the officer in return "Are you sure you will be alive then?"

Then there was a political leader who made it a habit to send his condolences when anyone died. When his wife died he did that. And when a senior journalist died after a heart attack, he sent a message, which said: "I hold the Government responsible. It must give suitable recompense to the deceased's family". The perturbed Chief Minister found out that in the printed message that the leader had always kept ready he had forgotten to strike out these sentences while sending it to the newspapers.

But the author has not said anything about such mistakes by journalists themselves. The following may be of interest: one day in Parliament in the 1950s a Congress Muslim MP from Madras delivered a blistering attack on the party and Government's policies. An amused Nehru sent an officer to find out what happened.

It came out that a senior journalist who was a speechwriter to many MPs had written the speeches for this MP praising the Government and an opposition MP attacking the Government. The speeches however got interchanged in the envelopes addressed to the two MPs. Nehru called the journalist and told him to be careful. The book is a very readable one.

G.D.

MALAYALAM

CINEMA — KALIYUM KARYAVUM: Nadir Shah (T.M.P. Nedungadi); Cosmo Books, Kozhikode-673042. Rs. 90.

THIS BOOK is a collection of essays on the

important aspects of cinema written over a long period of time by a serious student of cinema.

It has given a general outline of the growth of cinema in India. The development stories of organisations like the New Theatres and the Bombay Talkies are indicated. But many details regarding Tamil and Malayalam cinema have been avoided.

This indeed is a serious defect of these essays dealing with actors and others who have contributed much for the development of cinema in the South. No one with serious trend of mind can ignore the role it played in the South as a social and political force.

But it should be said that the advent of cinema has seriously damaged if not done away with, that of folk media in general. Great names like MGR and NTR still survive in the consciousness of people, as supermen. They have become folk heroes of a sort, if not otherwise. Any history that does not indicate details of their lives and place in cinema will be incomplete, let alone defective.

The general trend of films is to make money, if not, influence. This has been proved beyond doubt by the stories of MGR and NTR. But it should be noted that popular culture in the nature of folk culture died with them.

These matters have not been properly projected in this book. The balance that is essential, in a book like this is not provided here. The general feeling that a reader may get from the book is one of contempt as the result of lopsided and partisan approach of the essayist.

Another defect noticed is the over emphasis of six topics, which may be the bane of all cinematic writings. The violence that is part of cinematic themes is also not projected in proper light. In these days when crime has become part and parcel of society, this is reprehensible, to say the least.

A person who goes through the book with expectations raised by M. T. Vasudevan Nair, in the introduction, will be disappointed. The essayist and the introducer are responsible for this.

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ers. A poet, essayist, fiction writer, child litterateur and an articulate critic, he authored some 40 works, comprising collections of essays, short stories, novels, literary criticism, children's literature and comments on some general subjects.

Like Premchand, Niraala was ruling the roost for over five decades in the Hindi literary arena. A progressive thinker, he tried to build through his works, literary bridges between tradition and modernity. His writings also reflect certain conflicts between the creative and realist thoughts. While expounding modern thought, he deeply peeped into tradition with a keen eye. He always championed the cause of the farmer and the woman.

The then rising tide of nationalist fervour for India's freedom in the early 20th century had greatly influenced his thought and his writings amply reflect this aspect. While reading Niraala's life one is reminded of the late Dr. V. R. Naarla (1908-1984), Telugu poet, playwright, author, critic and the trend-setting journalist. Not only in their names (Niraala and Naarla), there are several similarities in their views on social and economic matters. This is an additional factor that adds to the interest of the Telugu reader in Niraala's writings.

In this monograph, Paramanand Srivatsav, himself an eminent poet and critic, has brought out the salient features in Niraala's works in a vivid fashion. He portrays the life of Niraala in all its aspects. As the publishers point out, the author of the Hindi original tried to highlight aspects of Niraala's life from a historian's angle. He touches upon various themes in Niraala's literary works, including the several contradictions evident in the evolution of his thought, outlook and articulate criticism.

The Telugu translation from the Hindi original is equally readable with its simple and even-flowing style. A book of special interest to the Telugu reader.

B. S. R. KRISHNA

MALAYALAM

CHEKANNOORINTE RAKTHAM: M. N. Karasseri;

Pappiyon, PB. No. 201, Manamchira Towers, A.G. Road, Kozhikode-673001. **Rs. 45.**

THE BOOK is dedicated to people who have significant works to their credit, in the cause of human rights. The hero of the work is Chekannoor Moulavi, with his real name, Mohammed of Malappuram district, Kerala. He was born in a humble lower middle class family in Chekannoor village in Ponnani Taluk. He grew up as a popular scholar who raised much controversy against the "clergy" and their versions of Muslim authoritative works of religious nature.

He based his studies on rational thinking and initiated publication of several journals and organized a few associations. He had a total of 18 published books to his credit, which are thought provoking. They are against fundamentalist ideas and ideals. He repeatedly emphasized that every one has a right to express his or her thoughts on matters of religious interest. It was this that provoked some persons in power, especially on religious topics. He ultimately "disappeared".

Karasseri's essays are able to illuminate many problems of this disappearance. He has also pleaded for the completion of efforts to reveal the nefarious activities of vested interests in this regard.

The essays are written well and with force in simple, lucid language. They explain in depth the points of view of the author effectively, while providing much information of the stand taken by Chekannoor Moulavi on various current issues.

K. R. NARENDRANATH

URDU

AAHANG — A Collection of Short Stories: Rafia Manzoorul Ameen; Beacon Publications & Communication, Hyderabad. **Rs. 150**

EVEN THOUGH this collection of 23 stories presents a wide range of themes, its prime thrust is the Freudian interpretation of sex as the driving instinct, both in man and woman.

In her introduction, the author explains how her stories were born out of her travels in India and abroad — to such culturally diverse places as the U.S., the Middle East, Mexico and the U.K.

MALAYALAM

CHORNNOLIKUNNA MŪRI: Sivadas Purameri;
Cosmo Books, Kozhikode. **Rs. 40.**

THIS IS a book of modern verse containing, 34 pieces in all, written impressively with skill. The poet's outlook and sensibilities are etched in all of them with care and effectiveness. Some of the poems contain vigorous imagery, a complex stream of thought, in which the past is constantly merging with the present.

The poet believes that our past determines the present and equally the present also determines the future. The general trend of his thought is that of pessimism and disillusion which sharpen his critical perceptions and experiences.

In one of the pieces he pleads for recreation of boundaries of time and space. He is for a form of poetry that has no rhyme and each moment is for destruction of behaviour in inhuman associated with inherited characteristics.

At a time when life becomes unreal, truth may become an unacceptable commodity to all. The poet believes that he is able to translate some of his experiences into reality through his images.

K. R. NARENDRANATH

MALAYALAM

C. V. KUNJURAMANTE THIRENJEDUTHA

KRITHIKAL: Collected and Compiled by Puthuppally Raghavan; Kaumudi Public Relations, 5/2246-4, New Kawdiar Gardens, Golf Links, Thiruvananthapuram-695041.

Rs. 125.

THIS BOOK provides a voyage of re-discovery of a period that has long since gone. When one reads through this material he is impressed by the relevant question raised to Narayana Guru by C. V. Kunjuraman and effective elucidations by the simple but apt replies given by the great savant.

The content of the book is selected and edited by Puthuppally Raghavan. It also includes a book published by T. K. Madhavan in his journal *Desaabhiman* in 1918, which deals with the pros and cons of the necessity of temple entry for the low caste Hindus at that time. The book starts with an appropriate pen picture of Kunjuraman by M. P. Appan.

The materials are grouped into several sections, each introduced separately by S.L.Puram Sadanandan, P. Govinda Pillai, O.N.V. Kurup, M.K. Sanoo, Azhikode Sukumaran and Puthusseri Ramachandran.

These sections deal mainly with short articles, editorials, poems and speeches of Kunjuraman. The reader will be highly impressed with the sweep and sway of the great Kunjuraman and the role he played for emancipation of the oppressed.

The great changes effected in the Hindu society by the temple entry proclamation of Maharaja, Sri Chitira Thirumal, became possible due to social changes initiated by Kunjuraman and others.

Special mention may be made of the language used by Kunjuraman not only in prose but also in poems selected and presented here. His sons and nephews such as Editor K. Sukumaran, Head Translator of Kerala K. Damodaran, C. Kesavan and others continue the traditions so carefully nurtured by him. The publishers deserve praise for making available such a book of great value.

K. R. NARENDRANATH